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POSITION OF GEORGE W. BALL

I am persuaded that the disadvantages of an air strike are too great for us to undertake. I have, therefore, concluded that the blockade plan -- while by no means wholly satisfactory -- is the course we should follow.

In reaching this conclusion I have begun with the assumption that the Soviet nuclear build-up in Cuba does not add appreciably to the Soviet ability to impose destruction on the United States. The Soviet Union already has a substantial number of ICBM's targeted on American installations. For the time being the slight additional increment of destructive capacity provided by the MRBM's and IRBM's Cuba might have some marginal significance. As the Soviet Union accumulates additional numbers of ICBM's even this transitory advantage will tend to disappear.

If this assumption be valid -- and I have heard no compelling arguments against it -- then the menace we face is not the addition of new Soviet military capabilities so much as their moral and propaganda advantage. As I understand it, the proponents of the strike plan insist that what we are facing is a test of will that will be witnessed by all the world. Unless the United States is prepared to use decisive military power, the world will lose confidence in our strength and determination.

But I think that -- far from establishing our moral strength -- we would, in fact, alienate a great part of the civilized world by behaving in a manner wholly contrary to our traditions, by pursuing a course of action that would not only thwart everything we have stood for during our national history, and condemn us as hypocrites in the opinion of the world.

We tried Japanese as war criminals because of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. We condemned the Soviet action in Hungary. We took a strong moral line against the use of force by the French and British at Suez when they felt their vital interests were threatened. We have taken a strong line in the United Nations and in other world councils against the dangers of a surprise attack with nuclear weapons.

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REVIEWED BY 12/4/67 DATE 12/4/67
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FOI, EO or PA exemptions () () ()
TS authority to:
() CLASSIFY () OADR
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IS/FPC/CDR Date: 4/8/82
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() CLASSIFY as () S or () C OADR
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It is my strongly held view that we cannot launch a surprise attack against Cuba without destroying our moral position and alienating our friends and allies. If we were to do so we would wake up the following morning to find that we had brought down in ruins the structure of alliances and arrangements and that our whole post-war effort of trying to organize the combined strength of the Free World was in shards and tatters.

I find the blockade plan unsatisfactory -- primarily because it does not provide a way to prevent the Soviet missiles from becoming operational. But, on the assumption I have stated above, I do not believe that this is a conclusive argument against it. While the blockade may cause some stickiness with other Free World nations, it will be generally accepted as a legal and consistent with our traditions. Particularly if the blockade includes FUL is can, within a relatively short time, bring the Cuban economy to a screeching halt. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union will have the choice either of running the blockade or of accepting it with the intention of creating a counter-thrust elsewhere. If it accepts the blockade the Cubans will feel isolated and deserted and I think the days of the Castro regime will be numbered.